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SUBJECT: BABIL ELECTS NEW GOVERNOR: A DA'WA CHOICE BUT ON A SHORT LEASH

CLASSIFIED BY: Kenneth M. hillas, PRT Leader, Babil PRT, Dept of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) On April 18 the Babil Provincial Council (PC) elected Salman Nasser Taha Al Zargani as Governor by a vote of 20 out of the 23 PC members present. Seven ISCI affiliated PC members, led by the former Governor Salim Al-Muslimawi, walked out of the meeting in protest. Da'wa and ISCI had been in negotiations to give ISCI a position on either the PC or as an advisor in the Governor's office. None of the offers met with ISCI's satisfaction, and Da'wa provincial leaders moved ahead with the vote.

¶2. (SBU) The new Governor is an Engineer, who was recently working in Kerbala. He is a technocrat with Da'wa ties, but is not a party official. Two years ago he was forced to step down as Director of the Babil Sewage Department under pressure from then-Governor Salim Al Muslimawi, who spread apparently false allegations Al Zargani. The new Governor reportedly carries a grudge against Al-Muslimawi and ISCI, which could add intensify ISCI-Da'wa tensions in the province, especially if the new Provincial Government is serious in its stated interest in investigating corruption. In a conversation with the PRT Leader a few hours after his election, Al Zargani expressed appreciation for the work of the PRT, which he said he "trusted."

¶3. (C) The new governor has been described by local Iraqis as honest, competent and educated. He is not a member of the PC. His nomination was reportedly approved by PM Maliki's office, and reflects a Da'wa desire for professional administrative competence at the provincial level, according to Da'wa sources. Da'wa provincial party chairman, Abu Ahmed Al Basri did not stand as a candidate in the end, despite his efforts to promote his own candidacy. The preference of the national Da'wa leadership for technocratic/management experience and doubts about Al Basri's educational qualifications - he is expected soon to graduate from a university extension course - seem to have ruled him out of contention.

¶4. (SBU) A Da'wa dissident, Majid Flejfel, broke ranks and put forward his own candidacy. Otherwise, the Da'wa led coalition held together in electing the Governor and Deputies.

¶5. (C) Comment: Da'wa, which won the largest vote percentage in the provincial election, does not occupy a single leadership in either the Provincial Council or the executive branch. According to Da'wa officials, however, the new Governor had to sign an undated letter of resignation, which was given to Da'wa party chairman Al Basri to hold. This and other signs suggest that Da'wa intends to play a strong role in the province's government -- but from behind the scenes. We expect PRT relations with the new Governor and his two deputies to be constructive and cooperative.

HILLAS